

‘Just blew my mind’: The myth grows for A’s speed-pitch guy

The Speed-Gun Kid, the 23-year-old nobody who recently signed a contract with the A’s after throwing 96 mph at a ballpark radar-gun booth for fans, tried Monday to demythologize his journey.

Failed.

Sorry, Nathan Patterson. You’re a walking legend. Deal with it.

Patterson’s story was already bizarre in a good way, and on Monday, he made it even better, without trying.

He held his first news conference by phone from Phoenix, where he will make his pro pitching debut this week in the rookie-level Arizona League.

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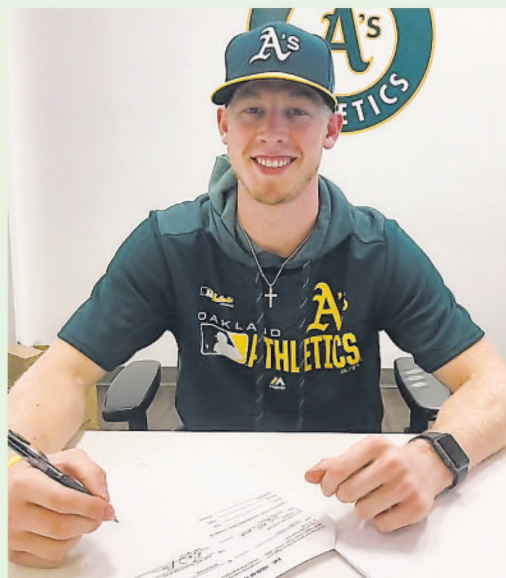


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The early reports after his signing noted that Patterson hasn’t played organized baseball since he was a high school junior. On Monday, he said

Ostler continues on B6



Nathan Patterson / Oakland A’s

Nathan Patterson signed with the A’s after hitting the mid-90s in a speed-pitch booth.

‘A’s Plus’ podcast



A’s beat writer Susan Slusser and national writer John Shea preview the Bay Bridge Series. sfchronicle.com/asplus.

‘You are living this’

Ostler from page B1

clarified that he didn’t even play varsity. He was on the JV team as a junior, a middle infielder, undersized (5-foot-8 and 140 pounds when he graduated from high school), with not much of an arm.

Now he’s 6-1 and 185 and can throw low-90s in his sleep, and is developing pitches to complement his Mystery (as in: where did *that* come from?) Heater.

Patterson shot down the myth that before busting 95 at a Coors Field fan booth this season during a rain delay, he did not even warm up. Of *course* he warmed up. Nobody throws 95 without warming up.

“I put my hand against the fence, stretched out my chest, shoulder. That’s really about it,” Patterson said.

Did you have a beer or two first?

“I might’ve had one or two.”

The actual discovery of Patterson’s freak ability came a couple of months earlier, at a minor-league game in Nashville, where Patterson was working as a software salesman. His family members were in town visiting and they decided to go to a Sounds game. Patterson’s words:

“I hadn’t thrown a ball in years. We’re all hanging out, having a great time. My friend and dad go, ‘Hey, let’s go in the speed-pitch and throw a ball.’ All right, let’s go have a

little fun here.

“My buddy hit 65 (mph), something like that. I stepped in next, first ball was 90, I was blown away. Honestly, I thought it was a joke, I thought they just jacked up the gun just to make you pay another dollar to throw another ball.

“I threw about five balls, and the last one I threw was 96 miles an hour. It just blew my mind, honestly.”

After he threw 96 at Coors Field, he posted the session to a pitching app, Flatground, and that got picked up by an Instagram account, Pitching Ninja, and it went viral.

“Two days later,” Patterson said, an A’s rep “called, said, ‘Hey, I’ve got a contract for you. How’d you like to come down to Arizona and be an Oakland A?’ So here I am.”

In reality, he was already on the A’s radar, and the A’s definitely beat the rush by signing him. The amount of his salary and signing bonus were not disclosed, but rookie minor leaguers earn a maximum of \$1,100 a month.

Patterson gave a thumbnail bio. Born and raised in Overland Park, Kan. Dad was a high school baseball coach, Mom a real-estate agent. The summer before his senior year in high school, he blew out his elbow, a fracture that hadn’t fully healed 18 months later.

He enrolled at a community college but

dropped out to run his fast-growing lawn and landscape business, which he had started years earlier. He and a friend mowed lawns six days a week, “sunup until sundown.” Then Patterson decided it was time to see the world beyond Kansas. He Googled “coolest places to live when you’re young and single.” In summer 2015, he said bye to his family and moved to Austin, Texas.

Met his girlfriend. Did really well in software sales. Girlfriend got promoted to a job in Nashville, so Patterson moved with her in January of last year, working his same job remotely.

After the Nashville Sounds speed-gun adventure, Patterson tried to put aside baseball thoughts. He had no interest in college ball, and even wondered, “Was that real?”

“I went back to Nashville, called up a facility, High Intent Training. Decided to go in and see if it was real. So I got on a mound, hadn’t thrown off a mound in years, was sitting 90, 92. I was, ‘All right, this is real. This is actually what’s happening.’ So I told myself, ‘I’m going to go back and play baseball.’”

He signed with an agent who hooked him up with a coach, former A’s pitcher Jarrod Parker.

Patterson was asked whether signing to play pro ball has sunk in yet.

“It honestly has,” he said. “The first few days, weeks, it was just surreal, but talking with my fami-

ly, my dad, he’s like, ‘Nathan, this isn’t surreal anymore, this is real. You are living this, you are an athlete, you are good, you are talented, you are athletic. Just live this, enjoy it, absorb every single day. ...

“I’m living it. I’ve gotten more comfortable with the clubhouse, and the guys. It’s definitely crazy to think about how I got here, but now that I’m here, I’m an athlete. I’m a professional baseball player, and now it’s time to make it to the big leagues, and that’s my No. 1 priority.”

A’s director of scouting Eric Kubota said of the signing, “It’s a roll of the dice, which it is with a lot of the guys that we draft.”

Kubota noted that Patterson’s speed-booth numbers were accomplished with a running start, and thus were not equivalent to throwing off a mound.

Sorry, Eric, this myth will not be derailed that easily. I asked Patterson whether anyone recognizes him from the videos and news stories, if anyone points at him and says, “Hey, there’s THAT guy!”

“It happened twice already,” he said. “People point at me and go, ‘You’re *that* guy.’ I’m like, ‘*What that* guy?’ ‘*That* guy.’”

Patterson probably will play himself in the movie. Why not? Suggested title: “Buck a Pitch.”

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